

## Message Text

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S/S/-O - PJOHNSON

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINS, LE, US

SUBJECT: OCTOBER 28 DEPARTMENTAL PRESS BRIEFING

1. FOLLOWING FOR YOUR INFO ARE PERTINENT EXCERPTS OF  
OCT 28 DEPARTMENTAL PRESS BRIEFING RELATING TO SITUATION  
IN LEBANON:

Q. WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THE SITUATION IN LEBANON  
AND THE AMERICANS THERE?

A. THE SITUATION THERE, JIM, CONTINUES TO BE, AS WE HAVE  
ALL BEEN READING, VERY UNCERTAIN; AND AMERICAN DEPENDENTS  
AND NONESSENTIAL PERSONNEL ARE MOVING OUT.

I DON'T HAVE ANY EXACT FIGURES AS OF NOW, EXACTLY HOW  
MANY AMERICANS ARE THERE -- I MEAN THE QUESTION OF --  
PEOPLE MOVING OUT. I AM TOLD THAT THE AIRFIELD IS OPEN  
AND THAT COMMERCIAL AIRLINE ACTIVITY APPEARS ADEQUATE TO  
HANDLE OUTGOING TRAVELERS. WE JUST RECEIVED THIS FROM  
OUR EMBASSY.

BEFORE THE RECENT FIGHTING BEGAN, TO JUST TRY AND GET INTO  
SOME FIGURES AS MUCH AS I CAN FOR YOU, THERE WERE ABOUT  
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475 OFFICIAL AMERICANS AND DEPENDENTS.

AND THEN I BELIEVE WE REPORTED TO YOU ALSO, BEFORE THE RECENT FIGHTING BEGAN ROUGHLY -- THE ESTIMATE WAS THERE WERE 5,000 ODD AMERICANS IN THE COUNTRY.

NOW OBVIOUSLY, THIS IS NOT, WAS NOT AN EXACT FIGURE. IT CANNOT BE. FROM MY OWN EXPERIENCE ABROAD, LOTS OF AMERICANS CHOOSE NOT TO REGISTER. SO IT IS DIFFICULT FOR ANY EMBASSY, ANYWHERE, TO GET AN EXACT FIGURE. BUT THE ESTIMATE THAT OUR EMBASSY GAVE WAS 5,000 ODD.

NOW AS FAR AS THE 475 OFFICIAL AMERICANS' DEPENDENTS ARE CONCERNED, THIS FIGURE WAS REDUCED BY ABOUT 50 PRIOR TO THE INTENSIFICATION OF HOSTILITIES DURING THE PAST WEEK. DURING THE PAST SEVERAL DAYS, FURTHER DEPARTURES HAVE REDUCED THIS FIGURE EVEN FURTHER -- BUT I CANNOT GIVE YOU AN EXACT FIGURE ON IT.

WITH REGARD TO DEPENDENTS OF THE PRIVATE AMERICAN COMMUNITY THERE -- THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY PRIMARILY -- DEPENDENTS ARE MOVING OUT. AS YOU ALL KNOW, THE EMBASSY SUGGESTED A FEW DAYS AGO, AND I THINK WE REPEATED HERE, THAT WE WOULD SUGGEST -- WE TOLD THEM WHAT WE WERE GOING TO DO WITH REGARD TO DEPENDENTS AND NONESSENTIAL PERSONNEL AND WE SUGGESTED THAT THE PRIVATE AMERICAN INSTITUTIONS, BUSINESS OR OTHERWISE, MIGHT WANT TO THINK ABOUT DOING THE SAME THING. THEY ARE DOING THIS; THEY ARE REDUCING.

I CHECKED WITH THE TASK FORCE UPSTAIRS, AND THEY HAVE NOT GOT FROM AMBASSADOR GODLEY -- AT THIS PARTICULAR TIME CANNOT GIVE US -- AN EXACT FIGURE, BUT IT IS MOVING DOWNWARDS.

SO THAT IS SORT OF A ROUNDUP.

Q. IS THERE ANY QUESTION OF SUPPLYING -- ANY CONTINGENCY PLANS FOR AIRLIFTING PEOPLE THAT MIGHT WANT TO GET OUT IF THIS PRESSURE CONTINUES?

A. THERE MAY BE CONTINGENCY PLANS. I THINK, AS  
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JOHN TRATTNER SAID A WEEK AGO -- AT EVERY EMBASSY IN THE WORLD WE HAVE AN EVACUATION PLAN, AND WE TRY TO TAKE CARE OF ALL SORTS OF CONTINGENCIES. BUT JUST LET ME SAY THAT AS OF NOW THERE IS NO NECESSITY TO CONSIDER THAT PARTICULAR OPTION. NOW THAT BEING SAID, IT MAY HAVE TO BECOME AN OPTION LATER ON. BUT AS I HAVE JUST SAID EARLIER, THE COMMERCIAL AIRLINE ACTIVITY APPEARS TO BE ADEQUATE.

Q. BOB, DO YOU HAVE ANY FIGURES, OR DO YOU KNOW OF ANY AMERICANS WHO HAVE BEEN INJURED OR KILLED?

A. WE KNOW OF NONE WHO HAVE BEEN KILLED.

THERE WAS A CHICAGO TRIBUNE REPORTER WHOM WE MENTIONED. IT WAS IN THE PRESS A COUPLE OF DAYS AGO. I DON'T HAVE HIS NAME HERE IN MY CURRENT GUIDANCE BUT HE WAS SHOT IN THE FEET, AND HE MANAGED TO GET AROUND THE CORNER AND HE WAS TREATED IN A HOSPITAL; AND I UNDERSTAND HE IS DOING SATISFACTORILY.

WITH REGARD TO THE TWO OFFICIALS FROM THE AMERICAN SERVICE CENTER THERE, THERE IS NOTHING NEW I CAN GIVE YOU ON THAT -- THOSE TWO THAT ARE HELD.

Q. IS THERE ANY APPROXIMATION HERE? HAS THIS NUMBER OF 5,000 AMERICANS, OR 475 OFFICIAL AMERICANS, BEEN REDUCED BY, PERHAPS A HALF?

A. MURRAY, I HAVE SEEN THE REPORT IN YOUR PAPER TODAY. I THINK THE FIGURE WAS ABOUT 2,000. I WOULD NOT QUARREL WITH THAT, BUT I CANNOT GIVE YOU A CONFIRMATION OF THAT. I TRIED TO GET THIS FROM BEIRUT TODAY. AND WITH THE SITUATION AS IT IS, WITH PEOPLE MOVING OUT -- THE QUESTION OF COMMUNICATION WITHIN BEIRUT, AS YOU CAN IMAGINE -- IS NOT THE EASIEST THING IN THE WORLD AND TO TRY AND TIE DOWN EVERY AMERICAN DEPENDENT AND EVERY FAMILY THAT MIGHT BE GOING OUT TO THE AIRFIELD TO TAKE OFF -- THEY JUST HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO GET ME A FIGURE. BUT I WOULD NOT QUARREL WITH THAT FIGURE.

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Q. WELL, I DON'T WANT YOU TO QUARREL OR CONFIRM IT, UNLESS YOU CAN DO SO ON YOUR OWN INFORMATION IT WOULD SEEM TO ME YOU HAVE A TASK FORCE WORKING ON IT AND THEY HAVE BEEN DEALING WITH THE SITUATION FOR SOME DAYS; AND I WOULD THINK THE STATE DEPARTMENT WOULD KNOW WHETHER IT IS DEALING WITH 5,000 AMERICANS IN LEBANON OR 2,500 AMERICANS IN LEBANON.

A. MURRAY, I WISH I COULD TELL YOU THAT IT WAS "2,752," IF I COULD -- BUT I JUST CANNOT DO IT. NOW PEOPLE ARE GOING OUT IN FAR MORE CONSIDERABLE NUMBERS DURING THE LAST FEW DAYS THAN THEY DID BEFORE, AND I MAY BE ABLE TO HAVE SOMETHING TOMORROW ON THIS -- AND AMBASSADOR GODLEY AND HIS STAFF OUT THERE ARE TRYING TO PUT SOMETHING TOGETHER THAT WILL BE MEANINGFUL BACK HERE BEFORE

I... ..

Q. IS THE UNITED STATES ENGAGED IN ANY DIPLOMATIC ACTION CONCERNING THE LEBANESE SITUATION AT THE PRESENT TIME?

A. DO YOU MEAN WITH REGARD TO TRYING TO CALM THE SITUATION DOWN IN BEIRUT?

Q. YES.

A. I AM UNAWARE OF ANY SPECIFIC INITIATIVE THAT THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT IS UNDERTAKING IN THIS -- SHALL WE SAY -- COMPLETELY INTERNAL DIFFICULTY THAT IS FACING THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT.

Q. BOB, THERE ARE SOME REPORTS THAT THE AMERICAN EMBASSY HAD ALMOST CEASED OPERATIONS IN ITS NORMAL LOCATION AND MOVED ELSEWHERE. IS THIS CORRECT?

A. NO, IT IS NOT CORRECT. THERE WAS A WIRE SERVICE REPORT YESTERDAY THAT CAME OUT, AND ABOUT TWENTY MINUTES LATER, THE STORY WAS KILLED. A SUBSEQUENT STORY WAS FILED BY THE SAME WIRE SERVICE. THE EMBASSY HAS NOT MOVED ANY PLACE ELSE.

YESTERDAY, THE EMBASSY -- THERE WAS CONSIDERABLE FIRING  
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IN THE VICINITY OF THE EMBASSY -- AND YESTERDAY AFTERNOON AMBASSADOR GODLEY ORDERED THE BUILDING CLOSED EARLY, AND HE SENT BACK TO THEIR HOMES, THAT IS, ALL BUT A SMALL NUMBER OF KEY EMPLOYEES. THE EMBASSY IS CONTINUING TO OPERATE WITH A LIMITED STAFF. BUT IT IS IN THE SAME PLACE, JIM. KISSINGER

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